

DRAFT

“Preface,” to John Witte, Jr., M. Christian Green, and Amy Wheeler, eds., *The Equal Regard Family and its Friendly Critics: Don S. Browning and the Practical Theological Ethics of the Family* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2007), vii-x

Editorial Preface

This volume is both a celebration and evaluation of the critical family theory developed by the distinguished University of Chicago scholar Don S. Browning. For the past two decades, Professor Browning has served as the dean of interdisciplinary family studies in North America. He has led a dozen major research projects that have brought hundreds of scholars around a common table and thousands of participants to public forums. He has published a dozen volumes of his own, catalyzed the publication of some six dozen volumes by others, and masterminded the production of a major PBS video on marriage. He has graced distinguished lecterns throughout North America, Western Europe, South Africa, South Korea, Malaysia, and Australia, addressing everything from kin altruism among the ancient Greeks to children’s rights in the modern United Nations. He has brought all the main axial world religions into dialogue with his own tradition of Christianity, and brought many of the social sciences, humanities, and professions into interaction with his own disciplines of theology and ethics.

Professor Browning brings to the study of the family a distinctive methodology called “practical theological ethics.” This is a method that combines his early work on pastoral or practical theology with his later work on theological ethics. Browning began his scholarly career as a leading scholar of pastoral care. His early research, begun already as a doctoral student in religion and personality at the University of Chicago in the early 1960s, gave rise to his volumes, *Atonement and Psychotherapy* (1966), *The Moral Context of Pastoral Care* (1976), and *Religious Ethics and Pastoral Care* (1983).

He then moved gradually toward a wider dialogue among theology, ethics, and psychology in his volumes on *Generative Man* (1973, rev. ed. 1975), *Pluralism and Personality* (1980), and *Religious Thought and the Modern Psychologies* (1987). These first two phases merged into an effort to reconceptualize practical theology and, indeed, theology as a whole, in his signature volume, *A Fundamental Practical Theology* (1991).

In 1990, Browning began to widen the field of practical theology by drawing on other social sciences beyond psychology and by focusing his work on the concrete example of marriage and family life. Many of the contributors to this volume had the privilege to watch his work unfold as director of the decade-long Religion, Culture, and Family Project at the University of Chicago in the 1990s. Others thrived under his subsequent leadership of the five-year projects on “Sex, Marriage and Family & the Religions of the Book” and “The Child in Law, Religion, and Society” both at Emory University, and a dozen other smaller projects on related themes.

In the course of directing these projects, Browning has produced a stunning range of new interdisciplinary writings on marriage and family life. Particularly noteworthy are his co-authored volumes, *From Culture Wars to Common Ground* (1997, 2d ed. 2000) and *Reweaving the Social Tapestry* (2001), and his more recent monographs on *Marriage and Modernization* (2003), *Christian Ethics and the Moral Psychologies* (2006), and *Equality and the Family: A Fundamental Practical Theology of Children, Mothers, and Fathers in Modern Societies* (2007). All of these are pathbreaking volumes, both in their insights and in their methods, and they will remain anchor texts in family studies for many years to come. Also noteworthy are his four new co-edited anthologies on the enduring teachings on marriage and childhood in the ur texts of the world religions and

on the shifting marital and family practices in modern American religions: *Sex, Marriage and Family and the World Religions* (2006), *American Religions and the Family* (2006), *Children and Childhood in American Religions* (2007), and *Children and Childhood in World Religions* (2007). He is now hard at work on a capstone monograph, *Christian Marriage and Modern Marriage Law*, which already has all the earmarks of another Browning classic in the making.

In this volume, we have asked scholars from several different disciplines who have worked with Browning to analyze his contributions to the study of marriage and family life, and to chart new pathways of potential scholarship in this vital interdisciplinary field. Gathered on the pages that follow are the reflections of several former students and fellow project leaders who together represent the fields of theology, ethics, pastoral care, evolutionary biology, law, demography, psychology, sociology, and history. Seven honorary forewords offer pithy assessments of Professor Browning's contributions to different guilds of family specialists. Ten chapters offer closer analysis of his development of specific themes.

The chapters cohere in part around one of the cardinal themes of Browning's work, namely, that marriage and family life must be guided and governed by an ethic of "equal regard." This is, in part, an internal family ethic that calls husband and wife to equal respect for the dignity and well being of the other, equal devotion to the procreation and nurture of their children, equal access to public and professional life, and equal sacrifice for the health, safety, welfare, and happiness of each other, of their children, and so far as possible of parents, grandparents, and other needy relatives. "Equal regard," is also, in part, an external family ethic that calls church, state, and society alike to give

special protection and support to marriages and families. These domestic institutions are ancient, natural, and unique cradles of conscience, chrysalises of care, and cultivators of good citizens that cannot be eroded by condoning transient truth nor diluted by encouraging marital equivalents. This “equal regard” ethic, which Browning traces to some of the earliest Hebrew, classical, and Christian traditions of the West, is captured most poignantly today in Catholic sacramental and Protestant covenantal models of marriage and family life.

We have encountered a number of debts in the preparation of this volume – beyond the enormous debt of thanks that we owe to each of the contributors for sharing their time and talents with us. We express profound thanks to Dr. Craig Dykstra and his colleagues at the Lilly Endowment, Inc. for providing us with a generous grant to assemble this volume as well as two related volumes by Professor Browning. It was Craig Dykstra and his Lilly colleagues who had the foresight in 1990 to see that modern marriage and family life were in deep crisis, and needed the kind of deep interdisciplinary analysis on which Professor Browning had embarked. Their \$4 million of support for Browning’s Religion, Culture, and Family project has permanently changed the field of interdisciplinary family study. It is a privilege to have a chance in this volume to illustrate and evaluate what Lilly’s visionary philanthropy has wrought.

We wish to thank Kevin Jung, Sara Schuurman, and Antonia Diamond, all from the University of Chicago Divinity School, for their research and editorial assistance in the preparation of this volume and the two related volumes by Professor Browning. We wish to thank Anita Mann of the Center for the Study of Law and Religion at Emory University for her skillful administration of this project, and Eliza Ellison for her editorial

insights. And we wish to thank Jon Pott and his colleagues at Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. for taking on this volume and its companions, and seeing to their timely production.

Not least, we wish to thank Don Browning, our teacher, our colleague, and our friend, for his brilliant scholarship, inspired leadership, and sterling humanity. He has left a deep mark on each of our lives and has influenced a good deal of our work. We offer him this volume with deep appreciation, admiration, and affection.

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